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ABSTRACT

This report examines how to hold schools accountable for educational quality. Collecting and disseminating school performance data to parents and the public is one accountability measure that school districts can implement. Most states currently produce school report cards or school profiles, which offer important information on their schools. However, 13 states do not produce these report cards, and many that do fail to include important data, much of which is already collected, that could make the profiles more useful for parents and administrators. The Center for Community Change identified various specific indicators that could be required on individual school report cards in all states (e.g., assessment scores, average class size by grade, four-year graduation rates, and indicators of overcrowding). The Center surveyed the 50 states to investigate the variety of school report cards that currently exist, determine how many states report the minimal list of data, and examine formats through which parents receive information. The Center recommends that administrators, policymakers, parents, and children receive much more than simply the assessment scores of students at the school. Three appendixes present sources and links to examples, Web site addresses for state report cards, and a matrix on current state report cards. (SM)

Individual School Report Cards

Empowering Parents and Communities to Hold Schools Accountable

A report by
The Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20007
202-342-0567
www.communitychange.org

April, 2001

The Center for Community Change

The heart of the Center's work is helping grassroots leaders build strong community-based organizations, which we believe are the building blocks of change in low-income communities.

These organizations tap a community's capacity for self-help, nurture leaders, improve programs, build houses, reform schools, develop businesses and give residents a say in their community's future, as well as a sense of hope.

Every year, the Center provides an array of hands-on assistance for more than 250 organizations that work in low-income communities, helping them get started, develop effective boards, raise money, organize their communities, set objectives, devise strategies, win issue campaigns, build housing and develop a stronger local economy.

The Center also works to give low-income people and groups a voice on public policies that affect their communities. It has helped lead campaigns to increase lending in low-income and minority communities, preserve and improve public housing, increase community involvement in federal funding programs, make foundations and other funders more responsive to low-income communities and much more.

In addition, the Center publishes a variety of reports, studies, guidebooks and newsletters and maintains a website (www.communitychange.org). It also has sponsored dozens of special projects that work on a variety of poverty-related issues.

The Center, a national nonprofit organization, has offices in Washington, DC and San Francisco as well as staff in other cities across the country.

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Executive Summary

Though much of this year's Congressional debate on education policy has focused on the need for accountability, little attention has been paid to the rights of parents to be presented with the information *they* need to evaluate what's going well – or poorly – in their children's schools.

The collection and dissemination of school performance data to parents and the public is perhaps the single most important accountability measure that local school districts can implement. After all, parents and students are the ultimate consumers of our public education system. If anyone has the ability to hold schools accountable, it ought to be them.

Most states currently produce annual school "report cards" or school profiles. These report cards can provide parents with a range of data on their children's schools. Most report cards are published on the state education agency (SEA) website, and many states require them to be sent home to parents or printed in local newspapers.

"Parents, armed with data, are the best forces of accountability in education."

President George W. Bush in
No Child Left Behind, a proposal
for education reform. February 2001

But we are missing an opportunity with these reports: while most states produce some form of report card, 13 states do not. And even those states who do provide individual school profiles fail to include important data – much of which is already collected at the state or local level – that could could make the profiles more useful for parents as well as administrators.

Data Empowers Parents

The Center for Community Change works with community-based organizations in low-income neighborhoods across the country. Many of the groups that we work with are engaged in efforts to improve their local public schools.

Over the past year, many of these parent and community groups have expressed frustration about the difficulty of gathering information about particular aspects of their schools. While local school report cards have provided parents with some information when they are available, many groups want more. Getting data from local schools or districts should

not be like getting blood from a turnip. Too many parent and community groups find that it is.

Through our conversations with parents and community groups, education advocates and experts, the Center for Community Change has identified a number of specific indicators that we believe should be required on individual school report cards in all states.

These data include:

- assessment scores, fully disaggregated as required by current Title I law;
- information about the quality of a school's teaching staff, as measured (at least) by average years of experience, levels of degree attainment, numbers of inadequately licensed teachers and measures of out-of-field teaching;
- average class size by grade;
- four-year graduation rates;
- disaggregated information on student suspensions and expulsions;
- indicators of overcrowding, and
- notification of whether the school has been identified as "low-performing" under Section 1116 of the current law.

We recommend that Congress, in its reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, require all states to establish or expand their current school report cards to include these indicators. States should be free to include any additional data they wish. Congress should also require that these report cards be sent home annually to parents.

A Survey of Existing Report Cards

Having identified these data as crucial to providing parents with a full assessment of their community schools, the Center for Community Change set about to identify the wide variety of school report cards that currently exist, to determine how many states currently report our minimal list of data and to look at formats through which information is provided to parents.

While we recognize that many school districts produce their own school profiles, for the purposes of our report, the Center looked only at state mandated reports and their minimum data requirements. We were interested in what data is available uniformly across the state – to all parents, policymakers and communities. We reviewed the individual school report cards included on the websites of state departments of education. In addition, we relied on a database produced by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) which conducted a 50-state survey of accountability mechanisms in 1999. In cases where the website and the CPRE data were contradictory or incomplete,

we followed up with telephone calls to the SEAs.

We wanted to know:

- which states produce individual school reports on an annual basis;
- whether these reports are available on the SEA website;
- whether the state requires these reports to be sent home to parents, and how the printed report differs from that on the website, and
- what data the state includes in these reports.

More than Assessment Scores

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was last reauthorized by Congress in 1994. That reauthorization (called the Improving America's Schools Act) required that all states receiving federal dollars under Title I of the act (Title I targets support to schools with large numbers of low-income children) produce individual school profiles on an annual basis. These profiles, under current law, must include disaggregated assessment results as a measure of the school's progress in meeting yearly improvement goals.

"Examining the characteristics of schools that are related to learning illuminates some of the reasons why students are, or are not, learning at optimum levels."

Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report
by the National Center for Education Statistics,
U.S. Department of Education. December 2000

But reporting assessment scores is not enough. Students' scores on standardized assessments are only the end result of an educational process. Assessment scores, like a finished stew, tell us whether a school has put together a winning combination of ingredients in its educational program. Assessment scores, however, do not divulge the ingredients themselves.

Study after study has found that there are a number of components that must be present in a school to make it a successful learning institution. While the components may vary from school to school, researchers agree that there are identifiable indicators of school success and school climate that contribute to student learning. And increasingly, researchers are agreeing that monitoring and reporting on these indicators is critical to helping schools identify where they need to improve and how to distribute their resources.

This data is not only useful for school administrators and teachers, but also for parents and community members. As President Bush himself noted in releasing his "Leave No Child Behind" proposal this year, "parents, armed with data, are the best forces of accountability in education."

Conclusion

Making schools work is more complicated than pressuring students and teachers to raise assessment scores. Such focus on the tests distracts educators from the ongoing work of educating children within a school building from day to day – work like insuring that all students are receiving a high quality curriculum delivered by competent teachers; that class sizes are manageable and allow for personalized attention for students in need of extra help; that the school's disciplinary policy encourages appropriate behavior and responds to inappropriate behavior fairly and equitably. These components of a school program will have more to do – ultimately – with a student's ability to score well on a standardized assessment than special test preparation programs or all-out threats. It's time that schools take a look inside the assessment stew to evaluate the ingredients.

Methodology

The Center for Community Change's survey attempts to ascertain the existence, content and accessibility of individual school report cards in each state.

We recognize that many school districts and schools develop their own school report cards without a mandate from the state. These districts may report additional data that the state does not require. For the purposes of this report, however, we confined ourselves to determining what the uniform statewide standard is for school profiles, and how these reports are disseminated to the public.

Most SEAs have substantive websites, and many of them include individual school reports in any of a variety of forms. In some cases, these report cards are identical to those that are sent home to parents each year. In other cases, parents receive less, or different, information than is included on the website. A list of websites where individual school report cards can be found is included in Appendix B.

In addition to checking the websites, we tried to learn when and where the home version differs from the website version, and, if so, to obtain a copy of what actually is sent home. Our premise is that most parents are unlikely to access this information on the web. We believe that while web databases are critical and extremely useful, simply putting a report card up on the web does not suffice. Parents should receive the report cards unsolicited, on paper, from their school on an annual basis.

An extremely useful source for cross-checking and updating our web and telephone collection process was the website of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania. In the fall of 1999 and spring of 2000 the CPRE conducted a survey of state assessment and accountability systems. As part of this survey, CPRE asked about the availability and content of local school report cards in all 50 states.

Additional sources included Education Week's *Quality Counts* report for 1999, and the National Center for Education Statistics' Statistical Analysis Report of December 2000, *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report* (NCES 2001-030).

School Report Cards – A Mandate for Information

Though much of this year's Congressional debate on education policy has focused on the need for accountability, little attention has been paid to the rights of *parents* to be presented with the information they need to evaluate what's going well – or poorly – in their children's schools.

Most states currently produce uniform, annual school "report cards" or school profiles. These report cards provide parents and the public with information about their children's schools. The report cards are generally published on the state's department of education website, and some states require that they be distributed to all parents.

This is a start, but it is not enough. States have far more information available than is included on school report cards. While we don't believe that it is appropriate to deluge parents with data, parents do have a right to be informed on a far wider range of school indicators than most of these report cards currently provide.

The collection and dissemination of this data to parents and the public is perhaps the single most important accountability measure that local school districts can implement. After all, parents and students are the ultimate consumers of our public education system.

The availability and content of individual school report cards across the United States is uneven. Thirteen states provide no individual school profiles at all – actually in violation of federal law, as we will describe below. Of the 37 states (plus the District of Columbia) that *do* produce school report cards, their quality and accessibility for parents vary widely.

We are missing an opportunity here. In the interest of identifying success and correcting failure, we, as a nation, must begin to disclose information to the public on how schools work. Individual school report cards are the right way to do that, and yet too many states produce no such profiles at all, or develop report cards that fail to provide useful and critical information about school performance.

If we as a nation want our public schools to be accountable for the ways they educate our children, we must first decide what they should be accountable for, and then who they should be accountable to. This year, as Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it should require that all states collect *and report* a range of data to parents, on paper, every year. A minimum selection of data should be required by the Congress, with additional information to be added at the discretion of states, local districts or even individual schools.

Assessment Scores are Not Enough

Since 1994, ESEA has required that states produce annual profiles for all schools that receive funding under Title I. These annual profiles are to be provided to parents beginning with the 1995-96 school year. According to our research, only 37 states are currently in compliance with that basic requirement, although a number of the remaining states have plans to implement a data collection and reporting system over the next twelve months.

Under current law, individual school profiles are required to present to parents only the results of standardized assessments of students – and these results must be disaggregated by a range of student groupings including gender, race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage. All states collect this data. Of the states that currently produce school report cards, only five include disaggregated assessment results.

Reporting on assessment results is not enough. Many things go into an individual school's success - or failure - in educating children.

Reporting on assessment results is not enough. Many things go into an individual school's success – or failure – in educating children. A successful school has a multitude of characteristics that many researchers and advocates have tried to identify. In May 2000, the U.S. Department of Education released a report identifying some of the indicators that seem to have a direct relationship on school performance *(Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report,* by the National Center for Education Statistics, December 2000). Their report concluded, as we do, that school success is the result of many factors. Some of those factors are measurable, others are more difficult to quantify.

While reporting on assessment results (whether the data are broken down or not) provides one indication of the effectiveness of a school's program, assessment results do not tell parents, administrators, or the public anything at all about the many ingredients that go into a school's success or failure. If the assessment results are the finished stew – which we as a community can applaud or decry – it is the individual ingredients in that stew that allows the community to understand *why* the final product works or doesn't work and gives them an opportunity to correct the ingredients if some alteration is needed.

To that end, schools must be required to disclose information on a range of indicators that contributes to the school's success. Reporting this data has many functions. It helps administrators identify where resources should be targeted. It invites teachers to reflect

on skills or resource needs. It helps parents understand more about the atmosphere in which their child is spending the bulk of his or her day. It provides, in short, reason to celebrate the successful schools, and a look at the ingredients that need to be altered for those schools that are falling short.

Much of This Data is Already Available

Some argue that requiring states to collect and report on more than simply assessment scores would be unduly burdensome. We disagree.

Federal funds are provided for the purpose of assisting states to improve the quality of public education. Congress and the Department of Education recognize that highly skilled teachers are a critical component of a successful school. Yet there is no requirement that states or individual schools report to parents on the quality of their teaching staff. This information can help districts identify teacher recruitment, support and placement needs.

The federal government provides funds to reduce class size, indicating that we recognize the importance of small classes for student learning. Yet there is no requirement that districts of schools report to parents about the average class size in their children's schools.

The federal government instructs states that they must not discriminate against students, based on race, gender or economic status. Yet important areas where disparities continue to be present – from discipline to curriculum opportunities to teacher quality – remain hidden because the data is not reported to parents and policymakers who could demand that something be done.

The federal government has recognized that states, local districts and individual schools need support through federal programing targeted at teacher quality, class size, school safety and more. We provide funding to them for those specific areas of support. And we demand accountability from states for the support they receive.

It's time to report to parents and the community as well.

Most states already collect, and some already report, this data. Of the specific data that we recommend be required in school report cards, every single indicator is reported in at least one state – without the mandate of federal law. State education departments have already identified the need for and the usefulness of collecting data on these indicators. Reporting it is but a small next step.

That said, we recognize that there are some states that do have concerns about student privacy. In North Dakota, for example, many schools or even school districts are so small that reporting on, or disaggregating, data would have the effect of identifying individual students in a public report. We agree that in districts where reporting data would effectively identify individual students, states should have the option to combine schools or districts in a way that would provide the data while protecting the privacy of individual students. The intent of this initiative is not to "out" individual students or teachers, but to provide parents, communities, teacher and administrators with the information they need to identify areas for improvement or commendation. The goal is to know what's going well or poorly in as revealing a way as possible.

What Should Schools Report?

Parents, administrators and the public need to know more about the recipe for student achievement. Comprehensive school report cards provide a picture of the daily life of a school – the ingredients of success or failure – that annual assessment scores do not provide. Comprehensive school report cards can identify the overall competence and experience of the school's teaching staff, one of the single most important indicators of student success. School report cards can identify whether students are struggling to learn in classrooms that lack resources or technology or in schools that are literally crumbling around them. Comprehensive report cards indicate whether classes are too large, and whether disciplinary policies are working.

A scan of current report cards across the country reveal a handful that provide comprehensive, well-designed information that should be easily accessible to parents, policymakers and the broader public. Some of these report cards reach out to parents and seek to engage them in the school. They provide space for principals to address parents. They present information on parent involvement, financial resources and staffing patterns. Other report cards are uninformative and unwelcoming of parent inquiries. Assessment scores are reported without annotation to help readers understand their significance. Other factors that could help parents understand a school's climate are not included. Some don't even include a telephone number or a single name of anyone at the school who could be contacted if the reader has a question or wants to help.

There are dozens of potential pieces of data that can be useful for parents and the community as indicators of a school's overall climate and level of achievement. Understanding that, the Center for Community Change, in consultation with parent's organizations around the country, recommends a minimum of seven areas that we believe are key. Below are our descriptions of those areas, what the current reporting on these issues looks like and why we believe they are important.

(1) Assessment Scores

Holding schools and districts accountable by providing public inspection of assessment scores is the reason why the federal government requires school report cards already – at least for Title I schools.

In addition to reporting aggregate testing results, accurate monitoring of how a school is doing for its students requires that those scores be disaggregated by a range of groups. We believe that disaggregated figures should be reported to parents as well. Title I requires that assessment data be disaggregated by the following categories: gender, race/ethnicity, Limited English Proficient (LEP) status, migrant status, students with disabilities as compared with nondisabled students, and economic disadvantaged as compared to non-economic disadvantaged students.

All states currently collect this data. But while 37 states report assessment results to the public, only five included the disaggregated data on individual school report cards.

(2) Teacher Quality Indicators

A high quality, highly motivated teacher can make the difference between success and failure for most students. Yet low-income children and children of color are disproportionately taught by teachers who are inexperienced, burnt out, or unequipped to teach. In fact, one study found that students in high-poverty schools were nearly *twice* as likely to be taught by teachers lacking certification in their field than students in more affluent schools *(The Problem of Underqualified Teachers in American Secondary Schools.* Richard M. Ingersoll, Educational Researcher, March 1999).

It is difficult to explain what exactly makes one teacher more or less effective than another, and therefore also difficult to devise an easy way to measure teacher quality. Data on teachers' academic skills are not routinely collected, according to the U.S. Department of Education's Indicators report.

> ...the single largest factor affecting academic growth of populations of students is differences in effectiveness of individual classroom teachers. When considered simultaneously, the magnitude of these differences dwarf the other factors.
>
> William L. Sanders
> *Value-Added Assessment*
> AASA Online. December 1998. Number 11 Vol. 55

Some studies suggest the following characteristics of highly effective teachers:

- They have high academic skills;
- They are teaching in the field in which they received their training;
- They have more than a few years of experience, and
- They participate in high-quality induction and professional development programs. (*Indicators* report)

Measuring the quality of the professional development program offered within a district can be difficult. But the other characteristics of high quality teachers can be accurately measured and reported. Several states already do so. Our survey indicated that 13 states currently provide parents with information on the average years of experience of their teaching staff. Sixteen states report on the level of educational degrees held by their teaching staff. Four states go further to include information on out-of-field teaching (teachers providing instruction in subjects in which they have no formal degree).

Congress has indicated a crystal clear understanding that quality teaching is a critical component of a successful education. Collecting and reporting data on the quality of every school's teaching staff is the first real step towards accountability.

All school report cards should include at least some of these indicators of teacher quality:

- school-wide, aggregate data on years of experience;
- the percentage of teachers teaching with emergency or provisional credentials;
- the percentage of *class sections* not taught by fully qualified teachers (this is a more accurate reflection of out-of-field teaching than simply reporting on the number of teachers teaching in- or out-of-field;
- the numbers of teachers with bachelors, masters or other degrees;
- the school's teacher turnover rate, and
- the number of teachers who are certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

In addition to including this data on annual school report cards, parents have a right to know immediately when their child is not being taught by a fully qualified teacher. The Center for Community Change supports so-called "Parents Right To Know" language, which requires schools to notify parents within two weeks if their child is being taught by a teacher not fully certified to teach in the field, and/or when the student is being taught by a substitute teacher for an extended period of time.

(3) Four-Year Graduation Rates

With increased pressure on schools to retain students not achieving at grade level, there has been a new focus on how schools can accurately measure student dropout and graduation rates. Education Week recently ran a three-page article (*The Dropout Dilemma,* February 7, 2001) on the difficulties of counting students who quit school.

Keeping students in school to obtain a high school diploma is becoming increasingly important. As the job market tightens, workers without at least a high school diploma are finding it difficult to compete for jobs.

Developing an accurate measure of the number of students who are completing high school and receiving a diploma is an important indicator of a school's success at preparing students for the labor market.

Many current school report cards include some measure of the school's graduation and/or dropout rate. But these figures are often very unreliable. As Education Week pointed out, different methods of measuring these figures can produce widely disparate results.

"We're just entering an era when there's going to be more accountability in making kids meet standards to actually get a diploma. There's a danger that will mean more kids dropping out, and we need to know if that is happening."

Phillip Kaufman, quoted in
Education Week. February 7, 2001

We believe that there should be a federally standardized method for measuring a school's ability to keep its students through 12th grade. Individual school report cards should include a figure for the school's four-year graduation rate, measured consistently in each district and each state. The report card should include a brief description of how the measurement is made.

(4) Class Size

Most educators agree that teachers teach and students learn better in smaller classes. Consequently, class size reduction has been an aim of school districts across the country and a focal point of both federal and state policy.

The debate about class size seems particularly important in schools with large numbers of disadvantaged children, who may need additional one-to-one mentoring by a teacher. Smaller class sizes support teachers as well, allowing new teachers to become comfortable with various classroom management techniques in a smaller class setting, and allowing all teachers to employ a variety of pedagogical approaches based on the individual needs of their students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "there is evidence that teachers in smaller classrooms deal with fewer disciplinary problems, spend more time on instruction and enrichment activities, and offer more opportunities for student participation." (*Indicators* report).

The dramatic impact of smaller class size was reported through one research project in Tennessee, which suggested that an average first grade student, after two years in a smaller class, might see as much as a 10 percentage point boost in achievement as a result of class size alone (*Indicators* report, citing Mosteller 1995). This report should leave no doubt that schools and districts should be required to monitor and report data

on class size. Federal mandates requiring the collection and reporting of class size data can help districts, states and federal policymakers continue to research the impact of smaller class size in student learning.

...greater gains in student achievement occur in classes with 13 to 20 students compared with larger classes, especially for disadvantaged and minority students.

NCES *Indicators* report

Ten states currently require schools to provide data on class size in annual school report cards. Five states go further, reporting on class size by grade, or by subject. This degree of specificity about class size can be extremely useful – helping administrators and parents identify where there may be groups of students struggling with larger classes, or teachers with impossible workloads. Class size data can also help to identify where additional space is needed, or additional teachers.

(5) Disciplinary Information

Another important indicator of a school's health can be found in its disciplinary records. Schools with high rates of suspension or expulsion of students need to pay attention to those numbers. Are classrooms so large that students do not receive individualized attention and may be prone to "acting out?" Are teachers inexperienced in classroom management and quick to send students to the office simply to get them out of their room? Are suspensions and expulsions meted out equally among different racial or ethnic groups? Are students not receiving high quality instruction that engages them and challenges them?

Parents have a right to know whether a school's disciplinary policy is appropriate, and whether students and teachers are getting the kinds of support they need to avoid high rates of suspension and expulsion.

This data is currently under-reported in U.S. public schools. Some school districts collect comprehensive data, while others gather only minimal information. For example, some districts collect discipline data that is fully broken down by race, gender and age, while others simply collect total disciplinary actions. Some districts do not distinguish suspensions from expulsions in their data collection.

In addition to the use of disciplinary patterns to assist schools and even individual teachers and provide them with the support they need for effective classroom management, disciplinary data can also identify racial tensions within a school.

In 1999-2000, through a project of the Applied Research Center (ARC), community and parent organizations in 12 cities attempted to obtain data about a range of racial justice statistics in their schools. Many had difficulty simply getting the data. But once completed, the research raised serious concerns about racial disparities in educational quality and disciplinary practice in virtually every district studied *(Facing the Consequences: An Examination of Racial Discrimination in U.S. Public Schools* by the Applied Research Center, March 2000).

The research conducted by community-based groups using the Applied Research Center's template found significant disparities in the use of suspension and expulsion in virtually every district involved. "In general," ARC found, "the Report Card data show that African American students are suspended or expelled from school in numbers proportionally much greater than those of any other group." (*Facing the Consequences*)

"No discipline policies should be implemented without taking into consideration their potential for racially disparate application and impact."

Facing the Consequences
Applied Research Center. March 2000

The ARC report concluded that the federal government should require "comprehensive, consistent, and centralized school discipline reporting." ARC went on to demand that "Congress and the U.S. Department of Education require all schools to fully report all suspensions and expulsions...disaggregated by race, gender and age of the student, and should specify the nature of the offense, the type and duration of the punishment, whether the suspensions were "in school" or "off campus," and whether the punishment was mandated under a zero tolerance policy." (*Racial Disparities Related to School Zero Tolerance Policies.* Testimony to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by Terry Keleher, Program Director, ERASE Initiative, Applied Research Center. February 18, 2000).

These type of data would help schools, school districts and states identify trouble spots where better administrative procedures, additional counselors, teacher supports or other measures are needed to reduce the number of disciplinary actions within a school.

While the full range of data that the Applied Research Center has requested should be collected and available at every school, we believe that local school report cards should, at a minimum, provide the numbers of students suspended, the number expelled, and a breakdown of these figures by gender and racial/ethnic group and ideally by grade. A number of states (8) do provide overall numbers. Disaggregated reports would help identify disparities and alert authorities to potential problem areas.

(6) Overcrowding

In May of 2000, the National Education Association released survey results finding that the United States needs $322 billion to build new schools, repair aging ones and install modern educational technology in all schools. The NEA report expanded on earlier projections by the U.S. Government Accounting Office – that the nation's public schools are in desperate need of repair, renovation and replacement.

All across the country, students are being forced to learn – and teachers are being forced to teach – in schools that do not meet even the most basic needs, such as adequate lighting, plumbing and heating systems. In 2000, the roof of one Cleveland elementary school simply collapsed. Yet districts have struggled to find funding to even begin to address these infrastructure problems. How long can we afford *not* to act?

Even those schools that are holding up are often grossly overcrowded. While some urban districts are suffering from a decreasing student base, others are seeing their student population skyrocket. The National Priorities Project reported last year that "over 50% of New York City and Chicago classrooms are overcrowded. Some suburbs have seen 17 to 22% increases in population in just two years" (*Recess is Over! It's Time to Address our Overcrowded and Deteriorating Schools* by the National Priorities Project in Collaboration with National People's Action, 2000).

All school districts have facilities offices that monitor the capacity and condition of their school buildings. Parents and the public need to understand what the district's facilities needs and problems are, and how they affect children trying to learn and teachers trying to teach.

Only two states – Hawaii and Connecticut – include information on their school report cards that indicate the condition of the school building or the rate of overcrowding within the building (Delaware includes the year a school was built, the year of last remodeling, the number of classrooms and whether the building is air conditioned). This information can be useful for a number of reasons.

In an era when many school districts are facing massive problems with aging facilities, collecting and providing data on overcrowding or the condition of school buildings can help civic groups, local officials and parents identify the schools most in need of support. This information can also be an important component of district programs to reduce class size, since class size reduction efforts can only be successful if there is enough space in a school building to provide for additional classrooms.

In city after city, community and parent organizations have played a critical role in pressing for local, state and federal support for school renovation and construction. Providing this information to parents on an annual basis can help spark the necessary community involvement to win new construction of the worst facilities.

We believe, at a minimum, that individual school report cards should include an easily calculated measure of overcrowding: the rated capacity of the school building, and the percent of capacity at which the school is operating.

(7) Notification Of Whether the School Has Been Identified As "Low Performing," Or Is In Danger of Being So Identified

Current federal education law establishes a protocol for schools receiving Title I funds which fail over a period of time to meet "adequate yearly progress" goals for improving assessment scores among all groups of students at the school. Section 1116 of the law requires districts to identify "schools in need of improvement," and requires districts to develop – with parents and school officials – a revised plan of action to help the school meet its goals. The law further provides, in cases where improvement is not seen within three years, that the district must take "corrective action" which may include reconstituting the school staff, removing decision-making authority from the school, or even authorizing students to transfer to another public school within the district. This local action may be followed by an individual school being identified for state corrective action if the local district is unable to turn around a designated school within a certain time period.

Under this very formal process, a school that is identified as "low performing" must develop a plan for improvement. And, according to federal law, parents of students at the school must be consulted and provided with the opportunity to contribute to such a school improvement plan.

Yet only nine states include, as part of their annual school report card, an indication of whether the school has been identified as a low performing school. This is a simple reporting requirement that states should be required to comply with.

Recommendations

As Congress considers reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year, much of the rhetoric has circled around concepts of "accountability." But rarely is that accountability extended to parents and the community. Holding states, districts and schools accountable to their federally submitted plans is important. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education must insure that all 50 states and the District of Columbia are in compliance with current law that requires individual school "profiles" of Title I schools.

But we believe that administrators, policy makers, parents and children must be provided with much more than simply the assessment scores of students at a school.

Assessments reveal the final results of many things that schools do to help children learn. Reporting solely on the results of standardized assessments overlooks the basic ingredients of a good education including high quality teachers, small class size and fair and effective school disciplinary policies. By reporting only on assessment scores, states and local school districts encourage educators to focus only on the outcomes, and not on the inputs. They feed into the public's perceptions that test scores reflect on the children, rather than on the quality of the education they are receiving.

No single factor contributes to a school's ability – or inability – to provide its students with a high quality education. As the U.S. Department of Education wrote in its 2000 Indicators report, there is more to school quality than the results of student testing. Parents should have access to information about several aspects of a school's climate including testing, but also including the quality of their teachers, information about class size and curriculum offerings, the quality of the physical plant and the use of school discipline.

Good school administrators monitor these numbers constantly, looking for ways to provide support to schools, teachers and students. Teachers should be monitoring this data as well, to help them understand how to improve the climate of their schools and their own classrooms. Parents and the community have a right to know some of the many factors that could be contributing to a school's success or difficulties. Individualized school report cards are the best way for that information to be provided.

While at least some data on school performance is available in almost all school districts, parents' groups around the country have found that that data is often difficult to shake loose from principals' or administrators' offices. This is unacceptable.

Parents should receive, for each year they have a child in the public school system a written "report card" for each school attended by their children. Simply putting that report card on the internet is not sufficient – particularly for low-income families who may not have access to a computer.

The Center for Community Change calls on Congress to include in this year's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a provision that requires individual school report cards for all schools in *all* states that receive federal education dollars. These report cards should include at a minimum, information on:

- assessment scores, fully disaggregated as required by current Title I law;
- information about the quality of a school's teaching staff, as measured (at least) by average years of experience, levels of degree attainment and measures of out-of-field teaching;
- average class size by grade;
- four-year graduation rates;
- disaggregated information on student suspensions and expulsions;
- indicators of overcrowding at the school, and
- notification of whether the school has been identified as "low-performing" under Section 1116 of the current law.

Congress should also provide financial support to states as necessary to increase their data collection capacity and to produce these reports on an annual basis.

Parents have a right to know. Administrators and teachers need to understand how these school factors affect learning. Collecting and reporting on school climate data is the first step towards improving our public schools.

Sources

Monitoring School Quality: an Indicators Report National Center for Education Statistics, December 2000. U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement NCES 2001-030. www.nces.ed.gov

Recess is Over! It's Time to Address our Overcrowded and Deteriorating Schools, a publication of the National Priorities Project in Collaboration with National People's Action. 2000. National Priorities Project, 17 New South Street, Suite 302, Northampton, MA 01060. 413-584-9556

State Assessment and Accountability Systems: 50 State Profiles. Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 3440 Market Street, Suite 560, Philadelphia, PA 19104. 215-573-0700. www.gse.upenn.edu/cpre

Quality Counts '99 by Education Week. January 1999

Facing the Consequences: An Examination of Racial Discrimination in U.S. Public Schools by the Applied Research Center, March 2000

The Problem of Underqualified Teachers in American Secondary Schools. Richard M. Ingersoll, Educational Researcher, March 1999

Examples

Many of the report cards we reviewed for this study were excellent, and included lots of useful information -- if not all of the indicators we recommend in this report. To take a look at a couple report cards we found particularly helpful, and visually accessible, click on the links below:

Hawaii:

http://arch.k12.hi.us/school/ssir/default.html

Connecticut:

http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/datacentral/ssp/ssp_frameset.htm

APPENDIX B: State Education Agency Website Addresses for School Report Cards

States	State Contact	Office/Division	Web Address
Alabama	Dennis Heard	Administration & Financial Services	http://www.alsde.edu/ver1/reports.asp?cat=2
Alaska	Harry Gamble	Office of Information	http://www.eed.state.ak.us/stats/home.html
Arizona	Barbara Fontaine	School & Student Accountability	www.ade.state.az.us/srcs/
Arkansas	James Boardman	Office of Accountability	http://www.as-is.org/
California	Martin Harris	Education Data Partnership	http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/School.asp
Colorado	Judy Burnes	Standards & Assessments	http://www.state.co.us/schools/ReptCard.pdf (sample)
Connecticut	Peter Prowda	Bureau of Research, Evaluation & Student Assessment	state.ct.us/sde/ssp/htm
Delaware	Mark Dufendach	Data, Analysis & Reporting	http://issm.doe.state.de.us/profiles
District of Columbia	John Williams	Division of Education Accountability	http://www.k12.dc.us/dcps/schools/schools_frame.html
Florida	Pat Faircloth	Education Information & Accountability	http://info.doe.state.fl.us/fsir/
Georgia	Mark Vigniti	Technology Services/Accountability Unit	http://accountability.doe.k12.ga.us/Report2000/
Hawaii	Glenn Hirata	Evaluation Specialist	http://doe.k12.hi.us/reports.htm
Idaho	Timothy Hill	Public School Finance	
Illinois	Shuwan Chiu	Research & Policy	
Indiana	Patty Bond	School Finance & Education Information	http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/htmls/performance.html
Iowa	David Alvord	Planning, Research & Evaluation	
Kansas	Sharon Freden	Assistant Commissioner	http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us/Welcome.html
Kentucky	Scott Trimble	Office of Assessment & Accountability	http://www.k12.ky.us/
Louisiana	Sam C. Pernici	Planning, Analysis & Information Resources	http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp
Maine	Brad Maxcy	Maine Educational Assessment (MEA)	http://janus.state.me.us/education/homepage.htm
Maryland	Kathleen Rosenberger	Planning, Results & Information Management	http://msp.msde.state.md.us/
Massachusetts	Jeff Nellhaus	Assessment & Evaluation	http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/
Michigan	Jean Shane	Executive Assistant	http://www.mde.state.mi.us/reports/msr/
Minnesota	Bill Brady	Communications	
Mississippi	Paulette White	Accountability Reporting	
Missouri	Lance Hutton	Division of School Services	
Montana	Dori Nielson	Education Data	
Nebraska	Bob Beechman	Education Support Services	http://www.nde.state.ne.us/
Nevada	David Smith	Finance, Audit, & Accountability	
New Hampshire	Judith Fillion	Division of Program Support	http://www.measuredprogress.org/nhprofile/
New Jersey	David Joseph	Office of Standards	http://state.nj.us/njded/reportcard/index.html
New Mexico	Kathryn Weil	Accountability & Information Services	
New York	Martha Musser	Information, Reporting & Technology Services	http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2000/
North Carolina	Gary Williamson	Division of Accountability Services	http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/reportstats.html
North Dakota	Duane Schell	Management Information	

APPENDIX B: State Education Agency Website Addresses for School Report Cards

States	State Contact	Office/Division	Web Address
		Systems	
Ohio	Janet Durfee-Hidalgo	Executive Assistant to the State Superintendent	http://www.ode.state.oh.us/
Oklahoma	Robert Buswell	Accountability	http://www.ed-stats.state.ok.us/Reports.htm
Oregon	Tanya Gross	Educational Support Services	
Pennsylvania	Gerald Bennett	Evaluation & Reports	http://www.paprofiles.org/
Rhode Island	Dennis Cheek	Information Services & Research	http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2000/value_added.htm
South Carolina	Mary Jo Ferriler	Office of Research	http://www.state.sc.us/sde/dsindex.htm
South Dakota	Susan Ryan	Finance & Management	http://www.state.sd.us/deca/data/00digest/index.htm
Tennessee	Benjamin Brown	Evaluation & Assessment	
Texas	Cherry Kugle	Division of Performance Reporting	http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2000/
Utah	Patricia Bowles	Finance & Statistics	
Vermont	John Ferrara	Policy, Planning & Objectives	http://crs.uvm.edu/schlrpt/
Virginia	Cam M. Harris	Assessment & Reporting	http://www.penk12.va.us/html/reportcard.shtml
Washington	Enrico Yap	Assessment & Evaluation	
West Virginia	Doris White	Office of Technology	http://wvde.state.wv.us/data/report_cards/2000/
Wisconsin	Vicki Fredrick	Office of Educational Accountability	http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/
Wyoming	Linda Carter	Data/Technology	

APPENDIX C: Matrix of Information Included in Current School Report Cards

State	Rept. On Web?	Rept. Sent Home?	Assessment Scores		Teacher Quality			Teacher Absence Rate	Identified as failing?	Class Size		Suspension		Expulsion		Overcrowding?	Identified Barriers
			Reported?	Disagg?	yrs exp.	degrees	% out of field?			Average?	By Grade?	reported?	Disagg?	Reported?	Disagg?		
Alabama	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes (1)	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Alaska	yes	no	yes	no	no	no *	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Arizona	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Arkansas	no	no (2)	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
California	yes	no	yes	no	no	no (3)	no (4)	no	no	yes	yes	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Colorado***	no	no	no*	no*	no*	no	no*	no*	no*	no	no	no*	n/a	no*	n/a	no	
Connecticut	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes (5)	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Delaware	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no (6)	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	no (7)	
Florida	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes (8)	yes	no	yes	no	no	n/a	no	
Georgia	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Hawaii	yes	no	yes (9)	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	oo	n/a	yes (10)	
Idaho	no	no	no*	no*	no (11)	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	
Illinois	no	yes	yes	no	yes (12)	yes	no	no	no	no	yes (13)	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Indiana	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no*	n/a	no*	n/a	no	
Iowa	no	no	no*	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Kansas	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes (14)	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Kentucky	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes (15)	no	no (16)	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	
Louisiana	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no*	n/a	no*	n/a	no	
Maine	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Maryland	yes	no	yes	R	no	no	no	no	no	no	no (17)	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Massachusetts	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no (18)	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Michigan	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes (19)	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Minnesota	no	no	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Mississippi	no	no	no*	no	no	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	

* = collected **= reported by school ***= Colorado is scheduled to have school reports by Aug. 2001Disaggregated by: R = race LEP = limited english proficient ES = economic status

APPENDIX C: Matrix of Information Included in Current School Report Cards

State	Rept. On Web?	Rept. Sent Home?	Assessment Scores		Teacher Quality			Teacher Absence Rate	Identified as failing?	Class Size		Suspension		Expulsion		Overcrowding?	Identified Barriers
			Reported?	Disagg?	yrs exp.	degrees	% out of field?			Average?	By Grade?	reported?	Disagg?	Reported?	Disagg?		
Missouri	no	no	no*	no*	no*	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Montana	no	no	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no*	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Nebraska	no	no	no*	yes (20)	no	no	no	no	no	no*	no*	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Nevada	no	yes	yes	no*	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	
New Hampshire	no	yes	yes	no* R?	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
New Jersey	yes	yes ? (21)	yes	no*	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
New Mexico	no	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
New York	yes	no	yes	no* (22)	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	
North Carolina	no (23)	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no*	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
North Dakota	no (24)	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Ohio	yes	yes	yes	no*	no	no	yes (25)	yes	no	no	no	yes	no* (26)	no	n/a	no	
Oklahoma	yes (27)	no	yes	no*	yes/note	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Oregon	yes	yes	yes	no*	yes/note	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Pennsylvania	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Rhode Island	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	n/a	yes	n/a	no	
South Carolina	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
South Dakota	no	no	no*	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Tennessee	yes	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no*	no*	no*	n/a *	no	n/a *	no	
Texas	yes	yes	yes	yes (28)	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Utah (29)	no	no (30)	no*	no*	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Vermont	yes	no	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Virginia	yes	yes	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Washington	no	yes	yes	no*	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
West Virginia	yes (31)	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	
Wisconsin (32)	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	
Wyoming	yes?	no	yes	no*	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	n/a	no	n/a	no	

Center for Community Change, April 2001

ENDNOTES:

1. In this case we only wrote "yes" when the state requires reports to be provided to individual parents. In instances where the report is reproduced in a local newspaper, or where the state simply "permits" or leaves it to the local district to distribute, we list this as a "no".
2. All states are required to collect this data, and to report it for Title I Schools.
3. Many schools report on annual graduation and/or dropout rates. For this survey, we reported only those states that calculate a 4-year, or cumulative graduation or dropout rate. Which one is provided is distinguished on the matrix by a "G" or a "D", respectively.
4. The "Academic Status" of the school is given, as well as a letter grade for school achievement over a 3-year period.
5. "Projected" 4-year dropout rate.
6. The dropout rates are provided for grades 7-12. There is no annotation on how the figure is calculated.
7. School Performance Reports for parents are to be produced in the near future.
8. The reports provide the number of teachers with full credentials.
9. The report card includes disaggregated data on graduates and dropouts, but the data is not cumulative. There is a 4-year "projected" dropout rate.
10. Colorado is scheduled to have school reports by August 2001.
11. A class size average is given by grade in elementary and middle school, and by subject in high school.
12. New accountability legislation requires that an accreditation rating be required for each school. Schools are conforming to state standards and this item should be included for the year 2000-2001 school reports.
13. The report provides information on the year the school was built, its last remodeling, the number of classrooms and whether the building is air-conditioned.
14. The state grades schools on an A-F scale.
15. Assessment scores are reported only statewide (the state has only one school district).
16. The reports state the number of classrooms "short" or "over" their need, and also rate the adequacy of school space compared to state standards.
17. The state collects staff data (CPRE report does not specify what type of data).
18. Teacher information is given by district and state (and therefore must be collected), but is not provided by school.
19. Illinois school reports present class size by grade for some elementary schools. The school average only is provided for high schools.
20. The average class size by grades is only provided for grades K, 1, 3, 6 and 8.
21. Indiana's website school report cards include a list of teachers at the school, the subjects they teach, years of experience, and degree attained.
22. Indiana's suspension and expulsion numbers are available for each school at a different website but are not reported in the individual school report cards.
23. The performance of schools is termed as "conditionally accredited" or "accredited."
24. The reports provide the percentages of classes taught by teachers with a Major, Minor or Equivalent in the subject they teach.
25. Starting in the year 2001, every school will have its own growth chart. The chart will display the school's academic improvement.
26. Assessment scores are only disaggregated by race.
27. Maryland disaggregates its 4-year dropout rate and blocks out graduating class information.
28. The reports refer to low-performing schools as being "unaccredited;" other terms used to evaluate schools are "interim" and "summary" schools.
29. Michigan school report cards are *designed* to report the annual dropout rate as well as a cumulative 4-year graduation rate. However, no data is provided in any reports we viewed.
30. Nebraska will begin to post School Reports on the web this year.
31. Nevada reports on disciplinary actions, but does not distinguish between student suspensions, expulsions, and referrals.
32. The New York State Education Department produces school report cards in conjunction with the University of the State of New York. The schools in New York City have a separate and very good school report card, which includes data not included in the official state report cards. Where the New York City school reports *do* include data, we have marked it with a reference to this endnote.

33. The state collects disaggregated data for Title I schools, and all schools for grades 4-8. No disaggregated data is collected for grades 1-3 or 9-12 (CPRE).
34. North Carolina's website has district reports where some disaggregated assessment data is included.
35. Most North Dakota districts have only one school per grade level, so district reports are essentially school reports.
36. The percent of teachers teaching out of field is reported for high schools only.
37. Suspension data is collected by ethnicity and gender, but not reported.
38. Rhode Island and Vermont produce average class size for elementary schools only.
39. Tennessee's school report cards give a school wide rating of "Exemplary" to "Deficient" for each test but do not report the percent of students performing by category.
40. Assessment scores are disaggregated by race only.
41. Utah publishes a district report, which is sent to all parents. In the year 2003 Utah will begin to publish individual school reports.
42. Virginia provides the percent of teachers meeting state licensure requirements for the subjects that they teach.
43. The report cards are county by county, but class size and teacher quality data are broken down by school.
44. Wyoming SEA includes School District Statistics Profile, which provides data on districts. Individual schools not included. Individual school report cards are sent home to parents and include information noted on this matrix.
45. Wyoming's School District Statistics Profile includes a cumulative 4-year graduation rate. Individual school report cards do not.

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